

Identification of False Prophets In Matthew--Chapter 24



The first reason one needs to learn *how* to interpret is that, whether one likes it or not, every reader is at the same time an interpreter. That is, most of us assume as we read that we also understand what we read. We also tend to think that *our understanding* is the same thing as the Holy Spirit's or human author's *intent*. However, we invariably bring to the text all that we are, with all of our experiences, culture, and prior understandings of words and ideas. Sometimes what we bring to the text, unintentionally to be sure, leads us astray, or else causes us to read all kinds of foreign ideas into the text.^[1]

FALSE PROPHETS IN MATTHEW 24

This essay seeks to understand the context of the last two occurrences of the phrase “false prophets” as employed by Jesus. As one reads through the Matthean account, one quickly discovers that Jesus employs the phrase “false prophets” only three times. This word group only occurs four other times in the New Testament.^[2] The wording is always used in reference to those who lead people away from God. This research develops a brief scenario of Jesus' confrontations with the religious leaders in **Matthew 21-23** in order to establish a background for a correct interpretation of the false prophets' texts in **Matthew 24:11, 24**.

It is significant that these two citations follow Christ's last controversy with the religious leaders (**Matthew 21:18—23:39**).^[3] Since this utterance about false prophets appears frequently in our religious journals,^[4] it is necessary to continue to analyze this declaration in the various contexts to see how Jesus employed the expression and to whom.^[5] Of the three occurrences of this construction in Matthew, one discovers that Jesus is the only one who employs this phrase. The first mentioning of this phrase “false prophets” had reference to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. The second and third occurrences of this word group are found in **chapter 24** that reveals a number of signs concerning the end of apostate Jerusalem along with its temple. This reference

to false prophets not only relates to ethical behavior but also to a denial of Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus in His description of the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 warns His people against those who would appear as God's Anointed One (Christ) and claim to be true prophets. Jesus, after enumerating kingdom behavior, summarizes by saying, "At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people" (24:11), and "At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible" (24:23-24).

To set the stage for an accurate identification of Jesus' false prophets in **Matthew 24**, it is necessary to go back to the events leading up to Jesus' admonition. Since words do not stand alone, then one must consult the events leading up to the use of certain words in order to grasp fully the author's intended meaning. Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez capture this truth and state it succinctly.

Most of us assume that if we wish to know what a word means, a look in the dictionary will answer our question. Obviously, this is true as far as definitions are concerned. But as to what is communicated by that word, we need to look at more than the dictionary. Words do not stand alone. They are spoken by one person and addressed to another.^[6]

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO MATTHEW 24

The First Major Controversy

The first major controversy with the religious leaders occurs in **Matthew 9**. In this chapter, Jesus rebukes the leaders of Israel for their "insincerity." Jesus had just performed a number of miracles (**chapter 8**): for instance, [1] He healed a man with leprosy (**8:1-4**); [2] He healed the centurion's servant (**8:5-13**); [3] He healed Peter's mother-in-law and cast out demons and healed all the sick (**8:14-17**); [4] He calmed the storm (**8:28-34**); [5] He healed two demon-possessed men (**8:28-34**); and, finally, He healed a paralytic (**9:1-2**).

As a result of these miracles, the leaders of Israel reacted negatively toward His healing ministry. Immediately following the healing of the paralytic (**9:1-2**), Jesus reacted strongly toward their inner thoughts. Matthew writes: "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!'" (**9:3**). Notice that this accusation of blasphemy was not verbalized but remained within their own evil minds. But Jesus looked into the inner recesses of their depraved minds and said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?" (**9:4**). For the first time in Matthew's gospel, the religious leaders and Jesus have direct contact. These controversies foreshadowed the final significant debate that Jesus had with the leaders of Israel. Jesus' ministry began with conflict and ended with conflict.

The Last Major Controversy

This last argument took place during the last week of Jesus' ministry. The following is a brief summary of the events that transpired during Jesus' final week:

- The Triumphal Entry (21:1-11)
- The Cleansing of the Temple (21:12-17)
- The Last Controversies with the Jewish Leaders (21:18—23:39)
- The Olivet Discourse concerning the End of the Age (chapters 24-25)
- The Anointing of Jesus' Feet (26:11-13)
- The Arrest, Trials, and Death of Jesus (26:14—27:66)
- The Resurrection (chapter 28)

During this final week (Passion Week), the hostilities with the religious leaders escalate (chapters 21-23), and then they put Him to death (chapters 26-27). These leaders continue to see themselves as the lawful leaders of Israel and at the same time the legitimate interpreters of Scripture and the official holders of their religious heritage or traditions. Chapter 21 narrates [1] Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (21:1-11), [2] Jesus at the temple (21:12-17), and [3] the withering of the fig tree (21:18-22). It was then, according to Matthew, that the chief priest and elders questioned the authority of Jesus: "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?" (21:23).

Again, as in His earlier major encounter with the religious leaders, He exposes them for their hypocrisy. To begin with, Jesus questioned them about the origin of John's baptism (21:24-27). In their response, they revealed their true character in the same way that they had manifested when they went out to hear John the Baptist preach in the wilderness (3:7-10). Prior to this last great controversy (chapters 21-23), Jesus had previously, according to the apostle John, brought to their attention two facts: [1] that their existence did not originate in God, and [2] that their allegiance belonged to Satan (John 8:13, 44). Matthew, too, records the head-on clash that led to Jesus' allegations (Matthew 21-22). Following the narration of this clash, Matthew gives the reaction of the religious leaders concerning Jesus' parables: "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them" (21:45).⁴⁶ Matthew further informs his readers that "they looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet" (21:46).

Earlier, in the beginning of His ministry, the disciples of Jesus had cautioned Jesus about His remarks against the Pharisees.

Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit" (15:12-14).

This final controversy with the religious leaders was not something new with Jesus.^[7] The climax of Jesus' ministry concludes with his final denunciation of these

false prophets. Matthew once more as he brings to an end his gospel opens this discourse of controversy with Jesus' questioning these evil leaders. For example, He interrogates these insincere men about John's baptism, as stated above, and after their refusal to answer His question about John's baptism (21:24-27), He responds with three parables that condemn these dishonest leaders: [1] The Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32); [2] The Parable of the Tenants (21:33-46); and [3] The Parable of the Wedding Banquet (22:1-11).

The Parable of the Two Sons

"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'" 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him (21:28-32).

In the Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32), He rebukes them for their refusal to change their minds and believe, even though they had seen God at work in Him. As one reads Matthew's narrative of the events, one cannot help but wonder if his readers did not reflect upon these same leaders in the prologue to his gospel when he wrote:

When he [Herod] had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel'" (2:4-6).

This Parable of the Two Sons is a slap-in-the-face against the false prophets in **Matthew 24**—and they knew it. Following this parable, Jesus presented another parable—The Parable of the Tenants.

The Parable of the Tenants

Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he

do to those tenants?” “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.” Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:” ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.” When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet (21:33-46).

In this second parable (21:33-46), Jesus demonstrates that the leaders of Israel failed to meet their responsibilities to God (21:34-36). Even when God sent His Son, they rejected Him (21:37-40). With these parables, Jesus places the religious leaders in the history of rejection of God’s Anointed One. God is now giving the vineyard to those who will accept Jesus (21:41-44). Matthew makes known to his readers that the leaders knew that these three parables were spoken against them (21:45). Instead of repentance, the leaders looked for a way to arrest Him (21:46). These leaders are the false prophets of **Matthew 24**. Once more, Jesus presented another parable to draw attention to their rejection of the One whom God sent—The Parable of the Wedding Banquet.

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ “For many are invited, but few are chosen” (22:1-18).

In this third parable (22:1-18), Jesus makes the same point about the relationship of the religious leaders and God's kingdom. This parable is a direct rebuke against the leaders. The major themes of this parable are: [1] The king prepares a wedding banquet (22:2); [2] those invited find excuses not to attend and, then kill those sent with invitations (22:3-6); [3] the king responds by destroying their city as punishment^[8] (Jesus develops this more fully in Matthew 24) and invites outsiders to attend (22:8-10); and [4] the leaders are warned that if they do not dress properly, then they will be thrown out (22:11-14). Over and again, Jesus nails the coffin shut on these false teachers in Matthew 24.

THE CONSPIRACY OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Now, four scenes follow these parables in which various combinations of the religious leaders combine their efforts to defeat and to put an end to this supposed troublemaker (22:15-22). The various sects combined their efforts to work together in order to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people. Immediately following the Parable of the Wedding Banquet, one observes the Pharisees and the Herodians in a clandestine operation to try to entrap Him. Matthew preserves this undercover operation for the extermination of Jesus.

Pharisees and Herodians

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away (22:15-22).

The first scene combines the Pharisees and the Herodians. These two groups schemed together to try to silence Him. They tried to lay a trap for Him over the payment of taxes to Caesar (22:15-16). Insincerity controls this pericope. In this showdown, Jesus calls these religious leaders hypocrites (v. 18). Why did He call them hypocrites? Matthew informs his readers that Jesus knew "their evil intent" (v. 18). In the next scene, one observes the extreme insincerity of the Sadducees in questioning Him about marital relationships after the resurrection.

Sadducees

That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. "Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his

brother. The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?” Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.” When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching (22:23-33).

The second scene embraces the Sadducees questioning Him about marriage at the resurrection (22:23-33)—they did not believe in the resurrection (22:23). They were spiritually blind in their understanding of the Scriptures (22:29-31); they were also spiritually blind in that they did not understand the power of God (22:29). Again, one recognizes an underhanded manipulation to catch Him in an entanglement that they imagined was hopeless to escape. But they failed just as their cohorts efforts also misfired in their attempt to try to get Him in hot water with the people or with the authorities. In the next episode, one looks at an expert in the law trying his hand.

A Pharisee: An Expert in the Law

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: ” ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (22:34-40).

The third episode involves their efforts to entrap Him over the greatest commandment in the law (22:34-35). Jesus knew that the Pharisees were devious, sly, dishonest, foxy, crooked and shrewd; He knew that this question was to test Him. Thus, Jesus in response to their question also asked them a question about who Christ is.

Pharisees

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” “The son of David,” they replied. He said to them, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? For he says, ” ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.”’ If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?” No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions. (22:41-46).

The fourth incident embodies the gathering together of the Pharisees. Jesus took advantage of this occasion and asked them to answer the question: “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” (22:42), but they refused to answer (22:41-

45). The religious leaders abandon their attempt to show that He posed a theological threat to their traditions through His exposition to the law. As one reflects upon the question Jesus asked the Pharisees, surely the readers of this gospel must have recalled this same question to the apostles (16:13-20). During His conflict (21:18—23:39), Jesus goes to the very heart of their problems: “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God” (22:29).

SEVEN WOES AGAINST THE LEADERS OF ISRAEL

Following this final conflict with the religious leaders, Jesus summarizes their many faults and addresses them as “hypocrites” and “blind guides” (chapter 23). In His brief explanation of the leaders, He warns His disciples to obey them, not to copy them: “So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach” (23:3).

Matthew 23 details one of the most graphic descriptions available in all of Scripture about the decadence of Israel’s leaders. Jesus issues seven woes against the religious leaders (23:13-33). Before enunciating the seven woes, He, like a bolt of lightning, goes to the very core of their corrupt nature: “Everything they do is done for men to see” (23:5).^[9] The seven woes announced by Jesus are devastating to these leaders. These seven Scripture citations are included in this chapter so that the reader may follow the context of Matthew 24:11, 24 in order to ascertain, beyond the shadow of a doubt, as to whom Jesus had in mind when He spoke of false prophets. The following is His stinging condemnation of the false prophets issued in seven woes:

1. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to (23:13-14).
2. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are” (23:15).
3. “Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it (23:16-22).
4. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel (23:23-24).

5. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean (23:25-26).
6. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness (23:27-28).
7. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous” (23:29; full text is 23:29-39).

In this conversation against the religious leaders, Jesus castigates them as “blind” five times (22:16, 17, 19, 24, 26) and as “hypocrites” six times (23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). They did not understand the important things in God’s revelation. These leaders did not go for inner purity but were content with externals (23:23, 27-28). They were faultless in their observance of their rituals, but they were short on “justice, mercy and faithfulness” (23:23). This inner decay was so rampant among the religious leaders that Jesus issued His scathing attack against their unethical behavior. Jesus confronted these leaders head-on in their full-fledged, legalistic, ritualistic, and hair-splitting teachings (23:15). Consider the following judgments voiced by Jesus in His reaction to the religious leaders’ hypocrisy:

- Brood of vipers! (23:33)
- Lawless (23:23, 28)
- Extortionist (23:25)
- Self-indulgent (23:25)
- Hypocrites (23:28)
- Abusive (23:34)
- Murderous (23:34-35)

Jesus’ castigation of the above leaders’ unethical behavior is not the whole story. In fact, they enter into a conspiracy with other leaders in order to bring about the death of Jesus. For instance, Matthew concludes his gospel with a reference to this conspiracy on the part of the leaders to eliminate Jesus.

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. “But not during the Feast,” they said, “or there may be a riot among the people” (26:3-4) (emphasis mine).

Matthew portrays the stealth employed by the so-called religious leaders to bring about the crucifixion of Jesus. They themselves do not openly arrest Jesus, but

rather they employed Judas for this clandestine operation (26:14-16). Next, observe how they hid behind the crowd that they sent to arrest Him (26:47). Then, even in the trial they employed false testimony and false witnesses to gain conviction (26:59-60). Again, they also accused Jesus of blasphemy in order to give credence to their condemnation of Him (26:65-68). Once again, while Jesus was on the cross, they mocked Him (27:41-43). And finally, they even went so far as to try to frustrate the resurrection by sealing and guarding the tomb (27:62-66).

CONCLUSION

Throughout the gospel of Matthew, the religious leaders are presented in a very unfavorable light. They rejected God's point of view about His Son. They acted without authority from God. Jesus acknowledges that they have no God-given mandate to lead the children of Israel; in fact, they are children of Satan (12:24-37). Jesus accuses them of being of the Devil (13:36-43; 15:12-13). These leaders are so corrupt and evil and dishonest that they cannot recognize the power and presence of God's initiative in the history of salvation (21:23). Jesus held them responsible for the future destruction of Jerusalem (22:7). Following His seven woes, Jesus foretells the destruction of their city (chapter 24).^[10] Is it any wonder that Jesus warned His disciples about the religious leaders in Matthew 24? As Matthew concludes his life of Christ, surely his readers must have reflected upon Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in which He forewarned His disciples: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (7:15).

My objective in writing this essay is not to attack those who apply Matthew 7:15 and 24:11, 24 to other Christians that often disagree with the "party cry" of the more than twenty-five divisions within the Churches of Christ. But the chief objective of this study is to help preserve the unity for which Jesus prayed in His priestly prayer (John 17). Hopefully, this in-depth study will help individuals to focus more on the context when they want to understand the intent of the author. There is a need, I believe, to guard against interpretations that may not, in spite of all their sincerity, ring true to the Biblical revelation itself. But often, subjective interpretations and dogmatic approaches by many Christians do much to deny the very Scriptures they claim to uphold.

Leaders (preachers, elders, and editors) should be very careful about superimposing upon a text their own speculative and subjective interpretation in order to avoid the very error that Jesus condemned among the religious leaders. May God help every Christian not to apply these Scriptures (Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24) to believers who hold to the use of Sunday school, individual communion cups, wine, grape juice, manner of breaking the bread in the Lord's Supper, the treasury, Bible colleges, instrumental music, hand-clapping, solo singing in the assembly, choirs, and so on. In concluding this study on false prophets in Matthew 7:15 and 24:11, 24, one must again ask himself or herself the question: "How did Christ employ this stinging phrase?"

^[1] Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 2d (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 14.

^[2] Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24; Mark 13:22; Luke 6:26; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:1.

^[3] The religious leaders go by many names—Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests, elders, scribes, and Herodians—and they form a co-operative front line against Jesus and thus can be presented as a solitary spirit. The Pharisees, Matthew 9:11, 14, 34; 12:2, 14, 24; 15:12; 19:3; 22:15, 34, 41; 23:26; the Sadducees, 22:23, 34; Pharisees and Sadducees, 3:7; 16:1, 6, 11, 12; the scribes, 7:29; 8:19; 9:3; 17:10; the scribes and Pharisees, 5:20; 12:38; 15:1; 23:2, 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; the chief priests, 26:14, 59; 27:6; 28:11; the elders, 15:2; the chief priest and elders, 21:23; 26:3, 47; 27:1, 3, 12, 20; 28:11-12; the chief priest and Pharisees, 21:45; 27:62; the chief priest and scribes, 2:4; 20:18; 21:15; the scribes and the elders, (with Caiaphas the high priest), 26:57; the elders, chief priests, and scribes, 26:21; 27:41. I am indebted to Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1996), 241, for this collation of Scriptures. His Chapter 15, “Characters: The Religious Leaders—Opponents of God’s Will” is extremely insightful (229-241). I also recommend Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), Chapter 7, “The Antagonist of Jesus,” (115-127).

^[4] See Chapter 2.

^[5] For examples of the illegal use of this phrase in reference to Christians: see the following journals or books: Tyler Young, “Will Great Lakes Christian College Continue to Support False Teachers?” in *Contending for the Faith* 27, no. 3 (March 1996): 12-14; Steve Gibson, “Some Common Questions About False Teachers,” in *The Restorer* 10, no. 11/12 (November/December 1990): 17-19; Allen Bailey, “Beware of False Teachers,” in *Preacher’s Study Notes* (Buffalo, Missouri: Christian’s Expositor Publications, 1996), 69-82; Homer L. King, “Avoid Them,” reprint from 1936, *Old Paths Advocate* LXVV, no. 1 (January 1996): 2, 6.

^[6] Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 94.

^[7] See also Matthew 15:1-14.

^[8] Jesus develops this destruction more fully in Matthew 24.

^[9] In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned His disciples about external behavior performed for show. In that Sermon, Jesus discloses the same mind-set (Matthew 6:1-8) that He addresses in Matthew 23 and concludes, as is done in Matthew 24 with His warning about false prophets.

^[10] For a brief explanation of Matthew 24, see Dallas Burdette, “Eschatological Judgment in Matthew 24:1—25:13” [ONLINE]. Available from <http://www.freedominchrist.net> [accessed 31 January 2001], located under caption BIBLICAL STUDIES and then under the subheading ESCHATOLOGY. See also Burdette, “The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats,” Ibid.